



WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST INDIAN TRADITION AND PATRIARCHY IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S NOVEL SISTER OF MY HEART

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ABSTRACT

India is the most religious country. The culture of India is full of rituals. It follows a particular tradition and social values. Social conservatism is found in Indian society where men and women play different roles. Men are always supposed superior to women. Women don't have their self-identity and self-existence without a male partner but they always try to search a male dominance free place for themselves. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has presented a long time struggle of women who are facing such issues. Now women are aware enough to take equal rights and opportunity in patriarchal society. They raise their inner voice to fight against this conservative mind-set. The present study is focus on the lives of Indian women and their struggle in male dominated society.

KEYWORDS: Indian society, women, patriarchy, tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The versatile writer Chitra Banerjee also known as Chitra Iekha Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Calcutta, India on 29 July 1957. She was born in a traditional middle class Bengali family. In the year 1976 she went to U.S.A for completing her education. She received her Ph.D degree from the prestigious university of California, Berkeley.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the living authors and an award winning novelist. Her works are widely renowned. Divakaruni has been published in over fifty magazines including the Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker. Her works have been translated into several languages such as Dutch, Japanese and Hebrew.

Being a feminist writer her area of interest is women. She mainly focuses on the women issues. In 1999 Divakaruni has founded Maitri, an organization which helps South Asian Women who are oppressed and victim of domestic violence. Regarding her interest of writing in an interview Divakaruni says: "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them: women in love, in difficulty, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to (be) prejudiced when they meet them in real life." (Divakaruni)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows her close connection with female. A deep sense of sympathy encourage her to write about those women who live in the poor villages and cities of India.

Divakaruni writes in one of her essays "what women share" about this female bonding. She writes: "I find myself focussing my writing on friendships with women, and trying to balance them with the conflicting passion and demands that come to us as daughters and wives, lovers and mothers.... In the best friendship I have had with women, there are a closeness that is unique, a sympathy that comes from somewhere deep and primal in our bodies and does not need explanation, perhaps because of the life-changing experiences we share... the same tragedies, physical or emotional, threaten us.... We take joy in the same small, good things of life.... We're sometimes furiously competitive and bitchy and exasperated. But ultimately we can be ourselves with each other. Ourselves with all our imperfection.... We can be women and know that, as women, we are understood." (Divakaruni, Bold Type, 1998)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's famous novel Sister of My Heart published in 1999. It deals with the conservative mind-set of Indian family. It shows the various aspects of women. This novel depicts the story of two loving sisters, Anju and Sudha who are cousins in reality. They both love each other deeply. They are born on the same day and brought up together in the Chatterjee's family in Calcutta, India. The house was run by three widow mothers, Pishi, Nailini, and Gauri maa. Because no male was there in the family. Generally in traditional Indian families man is supposed the head of the family instead of a woman. Only he has the right to take all the decision. Women always play a subjective role. She has to obey whatever is told to her. The family of both sisters was very traditional and conservative even they were not allowed to live their lives as they wanted. But Anju and Sudha love each other more than anything. They are sisters, partners and best friends who face every problem together. To express her deep and pure love Anju says: "I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half. The sister of my heart." Anju Further says, "I can tell Sudha everything I feel and not have to explain any of it. She'll look at me with those bid unblinking eyes and smile, and

I'll know she understands me perfectly." (Sister of my Heart, p.10)

Both sisters feel suffocating environment in the family. Their lives always seem to be controlled by someone else. Sudha and Anju's nature is different. Sudha is submissive. On the other hand Anju is rebellious to fight against this conservative mind-set of Indian society which set certain rules only for women. What to wear, what to eat, where to go. These things are already decided for them. Meanwhile the novel Sudha questioned aggressively: "Why must Ramur Ma go with us every time we leave the house even to get books from the neighbourhood library?" She asked. Why Can't go to Shushmita's birthday party when all the other girls in class are going, instead of sending a gift with Singhji? No wonder everyone thinks we're stuck up," And "I'm tired of this old women saries you make us wear. You'd think we were living in the Dark Ages instead of eighties. I bet there isn't another girl my age in all of Calcutta – except poor Sudha, of course – who's forced to dress like this. Why can't I wear Pants, or a maxi, or at least some kurta once in a while?" (p. 52)

Sudha feels her mother's protecting behaviour very suffocating. She further says: "What gives her the right to control my life, to wall me up in the name of her mother-duty? Wrong, wrong, this society that says just because I was born to her, she can be my jailer." (P.69)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni Shows rigidity of tradition which is imposed on the two girls. They want a free life to take fresh breath. The writer also shows her feminist spirit through her female characters. Regarding this Veena Noble Dass says: "The Indian women caught in the flux of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and aspiration of the future is the crux of feminism in India. The search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become prime features of literature under the influence of feminism." (Dass, Feminism and Literature, p.11)

Divakaruni tries to explore the inner frustration of Indian women who are very helpless and under pressure of this patriarchy. In the novel Sudha reveals about her love affair with Ashok. She wants to marry him but not allowed. As soon as possible Anju and Sudha's marriage got fixed on the same day without their concern. Anju got married with an NRI computer engineer, Sunil on the other side Sudha with a railway employee, Ramesh. After getting married Anju has faced so many problems and Sudha's life was completely changed. Because Sudha's mother-in-law and her husband were very rude and conservative. She used to behave like a typical mother-in-law. When she heard the news of Sudha's pregnancy, having a girl child in her womb. Sudha was forced to abort her baby girl because they want a baby boy. When helpless Sudha came to her mother's home Nailini says: "A woman can have many children, after all, but a husband is forever... what will we (sic) tell our relatives? Uff, she's smeared kali for ever on the Chatterjee family." (Sister of my Heart p. 266).

This shows the adverse face of Indian Society where a woman is forced to live with her husband whether he is good or not. But in this case Sudha denied to abort her baby girl. She decided to get separated and give divorce to her husband. Sudha wants to live her life independently. But there are many hurdles in the path of a divorced woman because in India a Divorced woman is supposed very unpious. But Sudha fight against this mean mindness and start living life with her daughter Dayita. As Sarojani Sahoo, an Indian feminist says: "This double career of women could be solved by rejecting the traditional patriarchal role of

parenting. *We have to insist on the idea of the equal division of labour in parenting*" (Sahoo, Sense and Sensuality, Blog)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni highlights the gender role in the novel. In the ending all responsibility are only taken by a mother.

CONCLUSION:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni an Indo- American writer shows the harsh condition of women in Indian society. She portrays a real picture of patriarchal system where a man is always preferred before a woman. The role of a woman is only to manage household things, cook food and being a caretaker of her children. But the heroines of Divakaruni are bold enough to break all these traditional barriers. They know how to live independently over this conservative society where a woman is only an object to use.

The present paper has explored a hard struggle of Indian women at various stage to survive in a male dominated society. It also focuses on the tradition values of India which somewhere becomes a barrier in the progress of women.

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